

Choosing Well, Choosing Life 2021  
Deuteronomy 30:15-19 John 6:47-56, 66-68

### Deuteronomy 30:15-19 (New Revised Standard Version)

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.

### John 6:47-56, 66-68 (New Revised Standard Version)

Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.

When I ran a business and would hire a new employee,  
I liked to point out that I was not giving them a job,  
but that I was giving them **an opportunity to succeed**,  
to build something worthwhile in the life...  
...and it was entirely their choice to decide how it would work out.

Both of the Bible passages we read today are about opportunities,  
and about making the most of God’s gracious blessings,  
by committing ourselves to the Lord **more intentionally** so that we grow  
and develop along our journey of faith.

Deuteronomy comes at the end of 40 years in the wilderness,  
just before the people would finally enter the Promised Land.  
The question was, would they respond well and faithfully  
to the grace of God’s promise and the gift of homeland?

Moses wouldn’t be there to keep a watchful eye and hold them in line.  
So, like a parent warning a child leaving home for college,  
Moses offered helpful advice & admonition: vs. 15~17, 19

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey ... by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments ... the Lord your God will bless you in the land ...

But if your heart turns away ... you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

... I have set before you, life and death, blessings and curses. **Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.**

... choose life so that you and your descendants may live... ... choose life  
<sup>1</sup>choose to walk within the blessings and promises of the Lord,  
<sup>2</sup>choose today to seek a deeper, more faithful and satisfying,  
more meaningful and authentic relationship with your God.

Imagine that you are just waking up --- but not in your own bed.  
You find yourself stretched out on a gurney in an emergency room,  
surrounded by monitors with tubes in your arm, up your nose  
and some very concerned faces are peering down at you.

A doctor in a white coat leans over, and looking intently at you,  
she says: "You are lucky – very fortunate.  
Not too many years ago, you would not have survived."

And then your doctor continues,  
"You have been given a second chance – and you will choose.  
Either you will change and start taking care of your health,  
or you will die --- you will surely die sooner, not later.

I warn you there is no middle ground in this, no half-hearted attempt.  
You must fully commit and fully comply to these necessary changes,  
for anything less, or not making that choice will mean death.  
**- So I urge you, choose life, so that you may live."**

"I urge you, choose life, so that you may live" ---

God has been saying that since the beginning: *Genesis 2:16-17*

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

... and as we all know; **Adam did not choose well he did not choose life.**

As I thought about these Scripture passages for today,  
and my own spiritual journey and life experiences,  
**I realized that my most significant growth-steps as a Christian,  
were when I was willing to make difficult and demanding choices,  
from which the Lord opened up new areas where God blessed me.**

It was a matter of trusting God's grace and promises, of deciding  
to step out in faith and choosing to take God more seriously.

**The John passage is also about our choices and commitments in life.**

The chapter begins with the feeding of the 5000,  
but then Jesus tried to get them to think more deeply  
about issues other than just their next meal. vs. 51

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

**Like the daily manna in the wilderness described by Moses,  
Jesus came from above and was God's gracious gift of life.**

If taken literally, the image of eating his flesh  
was of course, shocking and repugnant to his listeners, vs. 52  
"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus doesn't back down, in fact the Greek word he uses here, 'to eat',  
is more literally, to chew or gnaw on something. vs. 54 & 56

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, ... Those who eat my flesh and drink  
my blood abide in me, and I in them.

John's theology is that **the word of God** become flesh in Jesus Christ,  
As we read in Jn. 1:14 -- And the word became flesh and lived among us...  
As a spiritual metaphor,  
we are called to chew or gnaw on the word of God, or to abide ...  
**which is John's way of describing choosing to follow in discipleship.**

The key is that each of the words, word, flesh and bread  
are all connected with the ongoing-action word "abide",  
which literally means, to set up a tent together,  
to dwell in an intentional continuing relationship.

Those who keep on chewing and gnawing on me, **the word of God**,  
and those who continue to abide in me, I will abide in them.

Just as what you eat and digest becomes a living part of you,  
in Christ, the word became flesh, represented by bread we ingest,  
which describes abide, our on-going relationship with God.

To abide  
is a life-transforming belief or faith that is active and alive.  
It is a faith that <sup>1</sup>progresses, <sup>2</sup>that serves and <sup>3</sup>reproduces.

It's not just being saved, but cleansed and saved in order to serve.  
**Abide is an ever-deepening and active relationship with God,  
through which grace flows out through us to those around us.**

To abide is to serve  
usefully and purposefully in response to God's grace and call,  
and to commit our lives to bearing fruit and making a difference  
by reflecting/revealing God's grace & truth out into our world.

It is more than just admiring Jesus, or knowing facts about Jesus.  
**It's a relationship that allows Jesus to transform our whole being.**  
Jesus also connects the words, abide & eat to eternal life,  
to represent making a significant choice or commitment,  
**in contrast to just playing at the edge of Christianity.**

My first call as a pastor was to a new church development,  
where getting things started and going meant endless hard work.  
One time when I was doing a training class for some new elders  
and going over what was necessary and expected of them,  
one of them complained that it was way too much work and time.

I refused to back down, but pressed even harder,  
saying that I doubted that God had much use for half an elder,  
or for even half or 2/3<sup>rds</sup> of a Christian for that matter.  
**The minimum to get by was never an option God intended to leave open.**

I pointed out that it's really a matter of living out a decision  
to step out in faith boldly and **choosing to take God seriously.**

One time when I was much younger and even more foolish,  
I had strayed and drifted away from faith for a while.

On the way to a business meeting in Richmond,  
I narrowly avoided getting into a terrible traffic accident,  
and it frightened me, that it could have easily ended my life.

I woke up in the middle of night shaking and in a cold panic,  
and there alone in my hotel room and I knelt by the bed and prayed.  
In fearful repentance I asked God to show me the way back home.

**For me, a process began when I choose to take God more seriously,  
which over time, that truth has changed everything for me,  
when grace overcame my foolish complacency & reluctance...**

... which started for me when I focused on reading the Bible for myself,  
and trying to study and understand it, as much as I could,  
**which over time, that truth changed everything about me.**

<sup>1</sup>I began to read at least a chapter of Old and New Testament every day,  
which drew me in even more as I felt compelled to feed more deeply...  
**... or to chew more vigorously and voraciously.**

<sup>2</sup>In addition, prayer became a priority of my life, and for me,  
typing my prayer-thoughts into my laptop helped me stay focused,  
**and more able to listen and attend in the presence of the Lord.**

<sup>3</sup>I also began to worship more consistently, as I made more effort  
to connect with others by participating in the church's life.

<sup>4</sup>Another huge step that significantly changed my faith and life  
was when the pastor at a church where I had been attending,  
preached a stewardship sermon, urging a tithe, 10% or more.

Then he challenged the congregation to tithe **for just 3 months**,  
to see for ourselves and then at least we'd never have to squirm  
or feel guilty during a stewardship sermon ever again,  
just that was worth giving tithing a try.

and surely

**What I found was that tithing did something significant for my faith.**

<sup>1</sup>It broke the strangle hold of materialism over me,  
<sup>2</sup>which gave me an incredible sense of freedom from greed,  
<sup>3</sup>and a security no longer tied to an amount of wealth...  
**... which seemed to make even more room and space  
for God's Spirit to move and wiggle freely in my life.**

**It allowed for wonderful blessings and unexpected spiritual growth  
that happened in response to choices I was making,  
choosing to accept & receive God's gracious purpose for me.**

There have been many more choices & decisions, big things and little  
that have taught me, and continue to teach me about hope, trust  
and relying upon God's promises, stepping out in faithfulness  
and at times to leap blindly trusting the Lord God to catch me,  
**to bless abundantly and enrich this great adventure we call life.**

Of course I have no idea what decisions and choices you're facing,  
or what challenges and urgings God is placing before you today:

- it could be  
to recommit to Jesus... in renewal or even for the first time,  
to once again or even finally say and strive to live out,  
"yes, I do want to follow – truly be my Lord and Savior"

- it could be some task, a passion, a need for ministry, or service that God has been preparing in the background for a long time and is now nudging you to venture forward and move on it.
- or maybe it's a relationship where God is at work and urging, a grudge or a scar still being held, and that offends the Lord.
- perhaps today is the day to break down that obstacle, or whatever is holding you back and restraining your spiritual growth and joy.

It is a question of making choices:

**and one will bring us closer to God, and the other option does not.  
One makes more room for Jesus to move and work in our life,  
and the other limits or even shuts the Holy Spirit down.**

**Perhaps now is the time for each of us to trust and step out in faith,  
to find out just what God might accomplish in us and through us  
by breaking free from the bondage of a spiritual strangulation.**

Rather than accepting the mediocre of just enough to get by,  
how about **living a faith of excellence and all out commitment?**,  
and once and for all, **living in gratitude & peace by grace**,  
and really see if life doesn't get to be much better.

Dr. James Boyce was pastor at 10<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian, in Philadelphia,  
and he told this story about a Scotsman whose friend gave him  
a ticket for passage on a cruise ship to cross the Atlantic.

Trying to save his money, he brought along a few boxes of crackers  
to eat in his cabin rather than paying for food in the dining room.

Delayed by a storm his food supply ran out,  
and driven by his hunger, he finally went to the dining room...  
... and imagine his shock and surprise when he found out  
that meals were included in the price of his ticket...  
**... and what a shame, all the wonderful meals he might have enjoyed.**

Unfortunately,

**sometimes, isn't that how we live out our Christian lives?**

We're hesitant to partake fully of the possibilities & blessings  
that our loving God of abundance promises and intends for us.

**We settle for much less than the full bounty of what God has for us.**

So today, consider marking off a 3 month period on your calendar,  
during which you try to focus on seeking and obeying God's will  
in an all-out commit to spiritual growth and exploration  
of making whatever choices will enhance your walk with God...

... and even if you don't fully commit today,  
trust and know that God still loves and waits for you,  
**but what a shame to miss out on all that God intends for you.**

Consider the love and grace we're promised, John 6:51, Deuteronomy 30:19

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

I have set before you, life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life ...